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SUBJECT: ARF WORKSHOP RAISES DEBATE ON WHETHER CLIMATE CHANGE IS A SECURITY OR DEVELOPMENT ISSUE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The traditional climate change debate between developed and developing countries emerged during an ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) seminar on "International Security Implications of Climate-Related Events and Trends", hosted by the European Union (EU) and Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) in Phnom Penh on March 20 (participant list emailed to EAP/RSP). The EU and Japanese delegations presented findings from their studies on the security implications of climate change, which largely echoed the findings in a June 2008 U.S. National Intelligence Assessment on the topic. Developing country representatives stressed that many of the security concerns highlighted in the studies were development issues and called for developed nations to provide more assistance to meet Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Environment Programme (UNEP) representatives stressed that climate change could also drive positive change as a "peace-multiplier", rather than a threat-multiplier. The EU delegation, which pushed to hold the seminar, was pleased with the outcome and called for further ARF focus on climate change. However, the nature of the discussion, which drifted into the development discussions typically heard at United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings, seemed to fall outside of the ARF's traditional mandate of promoting dialogue on political-security issues. END SUMMARY.

DEVELOPED COUNTRIES' FINDINGS LARGELY CONSISTENT

¶12. (SBU) EU and Japanese studies on the security implications of climate change echoed findings in the June 2008 U.S. "National Intelligence Assessment on the National Security Implications of Global Climate Change to 2030". All studies found that: 1) climate change factors could exacerbate existing trends and tensions, such as poverty, environmental degradation, and weak political institutions; 2) intra- and inter-state conflict could arise due to scarcity of and access to resources such as land and fresh water; 3) coastal areas risk costly infrastructure damage or outright loss due to rising sea levels and extreme weather events; 4) human migration could intensify due to loss of land, shrinking income opportunities, and natural disasters; and 5) multilateral systems could break down as countries step up protection of their borders and resources.

DEVELOPING NATIONS: CLIMATE CHANGE MORE SERIOUS FOR US

¶13. (SBU) During the meeting's first session, developing country delegations discussed the potential impacts of climate change on their economies and infrastructures. The delegate from Vietnam explained that droughts in the dry season and flooding in the rainy season had become more frequent and more intense. Sea levels on Vietnam's coasts had risen by about 20 cm over the past 50 years. The Vietnamese study found that for every one degree Celsius temperature rise, maize yields would reduce by 5-20%, and rice yields would drop by 10%. The Malaysian, Chinese and Cambodian delegations described similar trends and threats in their reports.

14. (SBU) The Malaysian delegate called for stricter greenhouse gas mitigation efforts, criticizing EU proposals for a two-degree Celsius cap on temperature rises. A two-degree increase in temperature would be acceptable for Europe, he stressed, but would be a disaster for developing nations and island nations, such as the Maldives. The Chinese delegation called on developed countries, as those responsible for historic greenhouse gas emissions, to provide more support for adaptation activities in developing countries. Dr. Tin Ponlok of the Cambodian National Climate Change Office emphasized the need for clean technology transfer mechanisms and clearer adaptation funding mechanisms. He said that existing funds available for adaption, such as the Least Developed Country and Special Climate Change Funds, were either too small or burdened with complex rules for eligibility and financing.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT: SECURITY OR DEVELOPMENT ISSUE?

15. (SBU) Dinesh Patnaik, Joint Secretary from the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the most vocal of the developing country delegations, questioned the utility of examining climate change in a security context. He feared that looking at climate change through a "security lens" would draw attention and resources away from programs that would actually mitigate impacts of climate change. He argued that security threats highlighted by the EU and Japan (and the U.S.) were development issues. Poverty, mass human migration and conflict over resources may be intensified by climate change, he contended, but they already occurred today and had been seen in the developing world throughout history. He said that the key to mitigating perceived security threats was to minimize the inherent

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tensions caused by the development divide, such as poverty and lack of economic opportunities, which lead to economic migration and conflict.

16. (SBU) The EU delegation countered that climate change could and should be considered a security issue, albeit a "non-traditional" security issue versus a "hard" security issue. UNDP and UNEP representatives noted that climate change could have a positive effect on international security as a "peace-multiplier", a common threat against which nations must unite and cooperate to address. Alain Lambert, Senior Policy Officer for the UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, argued that if developed nations shifted some of their spending from military and other security-related budgets, they could redirect resources into "no-regret" investments that would benefit recipients even if climate change disasters never happen.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) The ARF Seminar highlighted the different vantages from which developing and industrialized countries view the potential impacts of climate change. The EU delegation was clearly in the driver's seat for this event and was pleased with the outcome. At one point an EU representative acknowledged that the ARF seminar was part of the EU's consultative process to gather feedback for its climate change roadmap. However, because the conversation frequently redirected to development assistance, the tone and content of the meeting ended up repeating many of arguments previously made in the UNFCCC process. Although the EU will push for more climate change discussions in future ARF meetings, these discussions may continue to duplicate existing global climate change negotiations and draw the ARF's focus from its traditional political-security agenda.

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